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Fatherly advice from great men

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The origins of Father's Day are less clear than Mother's Day. But for the sake of fun, let's call this the 99th anniversary of the day it was observed for the first time, according to some reputable sources, in Spokane, Wash. It did not in fact become a legal holiday in the U.S. (where so many holidays seem to be born) until former U.S. president Lyndon Johnson, in one of his better moves, declared it so in 1966. It became an annual event beginning in 1972. I think that is when Hallmark and other such retail operations most likely really began to capitalize on this 'new holiday.'

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My feeling about such holidays is that they punctuate annually an important dynamic that occurs every day of the year. Fathers or father figures are, after all, a very influential part of our lives. In my life, I have had numerous father figures, the greatest of whom, thankfully, is my own father.

I have learned many essential life skills from these men and have developed close relationships with them unlike any others. There have been teachers, sports team coaches, ministers, counsellors, uncles, grandfathers and cousins - guys of all ages with whom I feel comfortable sharing troubles, victories and disappointments. I find myself needing fatherly advice on a regular basis on a whole host of subjects.

I like fatherly advice. It usually comes with a minimum of judgment, the wisdom of years of experience, and a certain type kindness, which, oftentimes, masquerades as a heavy hand.

Even though it may be difficult to admit at times, we all need a helping hand, a leg up or a kick in the pants. These great men help us establish life's boundaries. They keep us safe and teach us how to keep ourselves safe. They can be very tolerant of the mistakes we make along the way; yet they can become necessarily intolerant when that mistake is repeated. If they didn't care, they wouldn't make time to guide us away from

forming dangerous habits, while at the same time showing us how to enjoy many of life's pleasures.

Although I don't have any children of my own, I have been a father figure to many. It is a role that has been grounding and humbling. People have sought my advice professionally over the years in the realms of collecting art, stamps or books; the natural rearing of and breeding and showing of pure-bred dogs; and, yes, proper etiquette, social graces and how to throw a great party.

These experiences fall into the realm of making a living and surviving. But then there are those times when people want advice of a more personal nature such as how to handle a difficult situation, how to get in or out of a relationship or how to digest and make sense of world affairs. These questions require answers that often come from my own life experience. That is why they ask me the question and not someone else. They want my input. They want to know what I would do.

And to all the men reading this column, this is exactly why they ask you these questions too. These are what I refer to as fatherly questions. They fulfill a need in another person who wants to sort of borrow me as a parent for the moment. To me, this is deeply satisfying.

This exchange is a wonderful example of how two people can show respect for one another. They value the other person for how they think, how they act and how they live their life. It is this social interaction that is carried from one generation to the next on the backs of mentors, sages and parents, which sustains the human species. How we learn to behave depends on those who come before us and in whom we entrust our lives. These finely honed skills are the etiquette of life. Without them, we are less than we might be in our lives.

So today, take some meaningful time to honour your father and those people who have played that role on your stage of life. Without them, you would be very empty. Giving gifts and cards is a nice way to mark this special day, but it is the heartfelt sharing of a few kind words that will have the most impact. It is also a great day to look around at those who could use a helping hand or a leg up and do what you can to extend yourself. This shows how respect can once again produce a win-win outcome.

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